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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE; NEA/IPA FOR  
WILLIAMS/SHAMPAINE/BELGRADE; NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/12/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [PBTS](#) [KHUM](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)  
SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MAYOR DELAYS CONSTRUCTION; EXCAVATIONS  
AT HARAM A-SHARIF/TEMPLE MOUNT CONTINUE

REF: A. JERUSALEM 266  
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 252  
[1](#)C. TEL AVIV 441  
[1](#)D. JERUSALEM 275

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, per reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Following several days of clashes in the Old City, Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski announced February 11 that construction of a new ramp to the Mughrabi Gate would be postponed to allow for discussion of the plans by the Municipalities Planning and Construction committees. However, excavations at the site continue, and Waqf Administrator Adnan Husseini says these excavations continue to be his primary concern and a potential cause for continuing clashes. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Construction of the new ramp to the Mughrabi Gate on the Haram a-Sharif/Temple Mount was postponed by Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski's February 11 decision to submit the construction plans before city planning and construction committees. According to Michal Sharvit, Foreign Relations Coordinator for the Mayor's office, the decision means that the public will review and comment on the plans before construction begins. Elad Halevy, Lupolianski's Acting Political Advisor, told poloff February 12 that the plans must be approved by the Building Permit Committee and the Jerusalem District Planning Committee before a construction permit is issued. In communications with the Deputy Principal Officer, Halevy said the municipality is still determining whether the approval would need to go through the local or district planning committee. He said the most important thing is that the approval process will enable "the entire world" to review the plans and procedures for construction. He also said that the new process would allow any resident of Jerusalem to raise objections in the planning committee. (Note: Post is seeking more details on the approval and objection process. End Note.)

Excavations Continue  
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[1](#)3. (C) Adnan Husseini, administrator for the Waqf, confirmed February 12 that excavations have resumed at the site. He said the bulldozers previously at the site were removed, and excavation work is being done by hand-held equipment. Halevy noted that postponing the construction is unrelated to the excavations, which he confirmed will continue. Yuval Baruch, Israeli Antiquities Authority archaeologist in charge of the excavations, told poloff February 9 that construction is not scheduled to begin before excavations are completed, a process he estimated would take at least eight months. Husseini has repeatedly said that the excavations are his

primary cause for concern. He said February 12 that he continues to be worried that continuing them will prompt protests and may spark further clashes.

14. C) Comment The Mayor's decision to delay construction is a positive step. The tense atmosphere is likely to continue, however, as the excavation continues. We are concerned that Friday prayers will continue to be a flash point, and the danger exists that clashes could continue and possibly escalate. ConGen will follow up with the Waqf and the Municipality to lower tensions and improve communications between the two sides. We will also explore with the Municipality whether the planning process can be extended to the excavation work as well. We understand Embassy Tel Aviv will follow up with the GOI along these lines.

WALLES